

Wish Come True by **TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)**

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-12-29

Updated: 2017-01-23

Packaged: 2022-04-02 00:22:14

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 10

Words: 16,501

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Why couldn't she just be normal? It wasn't fair. Why did the lab have to take her and mess her up like this?

1. Chapter 1

El stomped up to her bedroom, words still flashing through her mind.

It was Christmas Eve, why did she have to ruin it? Why couldn't she just be normal for one day? She was screaming at herself, guilt still flooding through her veins.

Mike's words felt like daggers, but the worst part was they weren't made from cruelty. He was just frustrated with her.

And he had every reason to be frustrated.

Their fight was still shaking her bones, all she wanted to do was lock herself in her room.

He was right though, wasn't he? El let out a groan, when in reality she wanted to yell. Why did she have to mess everything up?

She fell back to a familiar place. Her mind raced with wonder, why couldn't she just be normal? It wasn't fair. Why did the lab have to take her and mess her up like this?

El's anger had slipped away, all that was left was a recurring feeling. Hopelessness. She knew if she never went to the lab, she wouldn't mess everything up like this. She would be normal, but there was nothing she could do about it. Now she was just stuck like this, a

mess with a past that never should have happened.

She fell asleep with only a single thought on her mind. It was something that had been echoing inside her much more than she would ever admit. El drifted off imagining what her life would be like if Hawkins National Lab had never taken her.

It would be much easier, she thought. This mess tonight never would have happened. How many other messes would she have avoided if it never happened?

Combinations of anger and guilt eventually pushed her to sleep, mind too tired to think any more.

She woke up the next morning with thoughts from the previous night still clawing their way into her brain.

Merry Christmas, El thought sarcastically.

Head still shoved in her pillow, a knock at the door came through the room.

El groaned. She didn't want to deal with either Will awkwardly trying to speak for Mike, or her parents trying to find out what had happened last night.

But either way, it was Christmas. She wasn't going to hide away from

her family, no matter how upset she was the night before.

“Come in!” She shouted half-heartedly.

She heard the door swing open and steps enter her room, “Jane, honey, you have to get up! I told Becky we'd meet her at 2!”

Jane?

El's neck cracked as she turned around. Her eyes widened, this wasn't her room. Where was she?

She'd never seen this place before. Her heart started to speed up, fear seeping in. She started to imagine the worst possible situations. Someone had kidnapped her, her family was dead, the lab had got her.

Then her eyes landed on the mysterious woman standing in the doorway. El recognized her, it had been years but she was sure it was her. Back when she was 13, Joyce showed her all those pictures. She told El about a woman named Terry Ives, her biological mother. El recollected that day- it was the first time anyone told her about how she had come to the lab.

It was also the first time she started to feel that hopelessness that things would be better if the lab hadn't taken her from Terry.

But El had never met this woman, and now she was standing right before her and El's heart was beating out of her chest.

She got up and raced over to a bunch of photos on the wall. There were pictures of her with Terry, of a bunch of different girls she didn't know, and of a tall man with his arm around her.

This wasn't right. Who were these people? Where were pictures of her with her family or friends or Mike?

El stared at the photo of her and the tall man, trying to remember if she'd ever met him before. She knew the answer was no, but something must be going on.

Terry snapped her out of it, "Are you missing your father today?" El just stared at her, "I know, I do too. Holidays are rough."

Yes she missed her father, she missed Hopper. She would do anything for him to walk through that door right now and explain to her what was going on. But whoever that man was, he was definitely not her father.

Terry left the room, shutting the door behind her. El stared at the lock, attempting to use her powers to turn it. Yet nothing happened. As hard as she concentrated she couldn't get the lock to move.

El's fear then multiplied. She didn't have her powers. Whatever was going on, she didn't have her self-defense to protect her.

El felt herself start to fall back, so she pushed against the bed and collapsed. She couldn't think, all she knew was something wasn't right and her entire being was drenched in terror.

She started taking deep breaths, what she used to do after waking from nightmares. This must be a nightmare, right? She was still asleep, in her own bed, and soon she would wake up in her own room with her family at her door wishing her a Merry Christmas.

It had to be just a nightmare.

Deep breaths turned into hyperventilating as El's terror grew.

She didn't know what was going on, but she was in some strange room and Terry Ives was there, not at all as Joyce had once described her, and pictures were up all over the walls of her with people she'd never even met.

The information almost made her laugh, it sounded like this could be her life if she grew up with Terry. She thought about that enough, but it wasn't like that could ever be the case. The past couldn't change.

Right?

Realization set in. She couldn't understand it, but if there were things

like telekinesis and alternate dimensions in this world, supernatural events exist.

El squeezed her eyes closed. A part of her wanted to scream out “There's no place like home” and click her heels to see where that would take her. Whatever was going she didn't understand it, but her biological mother was outside the room and it seemed like she was much more of a mother than just biologically.

This was real, the thought sunk in. Whatever was going on, it was as if the lab had never taken El all those years ago.

El spent countless nights wondering what her life would be like if that hadn't happened, but right now all she noticed was the fear charging through her bones.

2. Chapter 2

El stared up at the ceiling for a while, just trying to ease the pounding of her brain.

It wasn't working.

Ideas still jumped around inside her, new fears popping out and diving into the pool of scenarios she'd already imagined.

Eventually she looked over to the table beside the bed. She saw keys and before El could process her actions, she was grabbing them and running out of the room.

A voice called after her, "Where are you going?"

"H-Home," she answered weakly.

"What?!"

El brushed it off and continued to run through the house. She finally found the front door and raced outside, using the keys on the first car in the driveway. They fit perfectly and El jumped in and started the ignition.

Still breathing heavily she pulled out of the driveway. She wasn't sure

what she was doing but all she knew was she wanted to go home. El didn't know where she was or what town she was in even, but she knew she could find her way back to Hawkins.

She didn't even realize she was still in pajamas, she hadn't even bothered to put shoes on, but she kept driving.

El drove around for anywhere from minutes to hours, her mind was racing too much for her to remember. But she saw the Welcome to Hawkins sign and felt a relief grow in her chest. She could just drive home, find her family. They could explain what was happening.

She was lucky she didn't get pulled over for speeding, but maybe she wasn't. Maybe it would be easier if she got pulled over. The officer would recognize her and offer to call Hopper, everything would be figured out.

El didn't notice when it started to snow, but pretty soon flakes of white were all around her. Zooming down Mirkwood she finally stopped at the familiar house she called her home.

She let out a sigh, she was home. Whatever was going on would end now. She could even see the Christmas lights hanging up inside.

El opened the car door and raced to the house. She was just about to knock when something caught her eye. She could see through the window. Joyce, Jonathan, and Will were eating breakfast. The seat she normally took was empty, and they didn't seem to notice.

It was as if no one was meant to sit there.

El took a step back, realization setting in. Whatever was going on, whatever world she was in, she was living with Terry. That meant the Byers had probably never even met her.

She wondered where Hopper was. Then El realized that Will's disappearance was what brought him and Joyce together. If she never went to the lab, the Demogorgon never got out... and Will never went missing.

She wanted to cry, tears were forming at her eyes. Before El knew what she was doing she was running back to the car. Tears were falling over the steering wheel.

She screamed at herself to hold it together when a new pair of headlights pulled up behind her.

Three boys popped out of the new car and El felt her heart close up. Her friends were there, *Mike* was there. If anyone remembered her it would be him.

She started wiping all the wet tears off her cheeks, trying to compose herself when she felt a knock at the window.

“Who are you?”

El felt herself whisper, “Mike.” He didn't remember her. The tears she just wiped away were fighting their way back. Not even he knew who she was, and she felt like everything around her was crumbling.

“Are you lost?”

El wanted to jump out of the car and hug him. Of course he was asking her this, even to a complete stranger he was still so compassionate. He was so caring it made her heart break.

Dustin and Lucas were behind him, eyeing each other with looks that said ‘Who's this weirdo?’

El rolled down the window and gave a weak smile, “I, uh, I'm fine. I think I just had a wrong address.”

She rolled the window back up and started the car, pulling away as the boys gave no second thought.

She wanted to scream and yell and let all her frustration out. How could they not remember her? What was going on that was making all of this happen?

El started driving, not quite sure where she was going, but knowing she had to go somewhere.

Then she passed the gate.

Hawkins Lab has haunted her every day of her life, but right now seeing it tore her to pieces. She broke down, all the tears she'd fought to suppress earlier were pouring out. She had hated that place so much, but right now in whatever alternate reality she'd stepped into, it was out of her life and she didn't know what to do.

All she wanted was for the boys to recognize her, to have her family back. El would gladly spend 12 years in there if that meant she could have them back when she got out.

Tears still wetting her cheeks, she went to the same place she went to last time we felt this alone and lost.

El parked in the grocery store lot. She walked in looking for the familiar spot where the Eggos were. She really needed a comfort food around now.

A store worker eyed her, wondering what a barefoot girl with puffy eyes was doing there Christmas morning. El didn't care what he thought though, she was well used to feeling out of place.

She paid with some money she found in her sweatpants pocket. She wasn't going to steal this time, not like she had the choice anyway, with her lack of powers.

She didn't bother to go back to her car. The cold snow seemed welcoming. So El stomped off into the Hawkins woods, the worker back at the store still in confusion over what was going on.

El ripped open a box of Eggos, familiarity rushing back to her. She remembered when she was 12 years old doing this. She hadn't known what was going on then either, but at least then there were people looking for her. She remembered the sounds of Mike and Dustin calling out her name.

Then a terrifying thought hit El. Shouldn't Mike be dead? If she wasn't there to save him that day, he would have been killed jumping off the cliff.

Then she realized that without her, he never would have been in danger to begin with. Troy would have beat him up and it would be over. She just had to make the decision to make him pee himself. Then the vengeful boy was determined to hurt Mike.

She didn't save Mike's life, she endangered it.

A wave of guilt passed through El. Without her interference Mike never would have been in trouble that day. The Demogorgon wouldn't have left the Upside Down. Will wouldn't have been taken and countless people would still be alive.

It was all her fault.

Maybe they were all better off without her interfering in their lives.

3. Chapter 3

El barely noticed Terry's yells when she went back to the house that night.

"Where were you? How could you blow off Christmas?" El ignored the questioning as she raced into "her" room.

She hated people yelling at her, it always made her want to run away and close up, but right now she couldn't bring herself to care. It wasn't like this was real anyway, or if it was, it shouldn't be.

She tried to tell herself it wasn't real. It was all a dream and she'd wake up and everything would be normal again. But she knew, as much as she pretended it wasn't true, whatever Hell she stepped into wasn't going to let her leave so easily.

Her eyes shut tight, and she drifted off to sleep, imagining waking up back home. Whatever it took to get her to fall asleep.

Sometimes you have to tell yourself a lie just to get through the day.

As much as she wished otherwise, however, when she woke up in the morning the same foreign walls surrounded her.

El sat up, looking around the room when she noticed the figure at the foot of the bed. Terry was giving her a warm smile that only made El

feel alert. She was clearly upset last night, a smile now reminded El too much of the lab, of Papa's fits of anger followed by a kind face and gift the next morning.

"Good morning, sweetie," Terry offered her.

El looked around cautiously, giving a weak, "Good morning," back.

"I'm sorry for last night. I know something must have been going on for you to miss Christmas dinner, I know you love visiting Aunt Becky. Just tell me where you were."

She gave a heartfelt grin, but it felt too much like a push for El, "I- I don't know."

Terry's eyebrows scrunched together, looking over with concern, "Are you feeling alright?" She raised her hand towards El's forehead, but she flinched away from the strange hand.

El pulled back while Terry just stared at her.

"I'm going to call Lucy and invite her over, okay? I'm sure you girls wanted to meet sometime today anyway."

And with that, Terry left the room. El lied back down onto the bed, attempting to catch her ragged breathing.

Who was Lucy? She started juggling ideas in her mind, but was cut off by the sound of a door opening and a girl around her age rushing in. El recognized her from one of the pictures on the wall. She had curly, brown hair and glasses that seemed to take up her entire face.

“Janey, Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas,” El offered back shyly.

“What did you do? I went out to eat with David. He gave me this mixtape he made, and we listened to it together. It was so much fun!”

El assumed David must be her boyfriend or someone, “I just, uh, went to visit some family.”

“That's fun!”

El looked at this girl. She was in several of the pictures on the wall, Lucy must be one of Jane's best friends.

El stopped for a second, this was a friend. She could potentially be El's friend too. Could she trust this girl? Could she tell her what was going on?

“Hey, uh, Lucy?”

“Yeah?” The girl looked up at her, smile so high it was practically hitting those giant glasses.

Something about that smile unnerved El. This girl seemed so happy, so... carefree? She shouldn't bring her into her own problems. It's not like Lucy would believe her anyway.

“Um, nevermind.”

Lucy looked at her questioningly for a second, then brushed it off, “Hey did you start working on Freid’s project?”

“Project?”

“Yeah, you know, the story we have to write.”

El gulped, Jane’s schoolwork wasn't her priority right now, “Oh, um, no.”

“I finished mine last night, I think it turned out really well!” Lucy beamed.

“What's it about?” El tried to be interested.

"You forgot again!" El suddenly felt her pulse race up. She didn't want to get Lucy mad at her, right now she seemed to be her only friend, even if it wasn't real. But her worries didn't last long, Lucy just laughed it off, "Well the main character is this girl Eliza."

"El- Eliza?"

"Yeah, and she was put in the foster system when she was a baby. Then one day she starts wondering what her life would be like if that never happened, and she wakes up the next morning and it's like it didn't! She's living with her birth mother and everything is different!"

Lucy paused for a second, and El's mind was racing. This was just Lucy's story, she tried to tell herself, it may be eerily similar to what was happening to her, but it was just something Lucy made up.

Well wasn't all of this made up though?

El was never religious, but wasn't everything happening around her something God or the universe or whoever made up to scare the life out of her? Could Lucy's story mean something?

"H- How does she fix it?"

Lucy gave a smug grin, "Isn't it obvious? She has to learn to appreciate the life she had before."

El sunk back. That wasn't much help. Of course she appreciated her life, all she wanted right now was to be back home.

“So,” Lucy continued, “She has to learn to love the bad parts of her life through the good. She waits until her boyfriend, Davis, now shush before you say he's inspired by David, kisses her and it goes back to normal.”

“Davis just had to kiss Eliza?” El's eyes were wide open.

“Yeah, but no. The kiss didn't mean anything, what really happened was Davis had to fall in love with her again.”

El could feel her heart beat five times as fast, pounding from her chest to her brain to every extremity in her body. This all started with the fight with Mike, of course it would have to do with him.

She had to get Mike to fall in love with her? She just saw him yesterday, he didn't even recognize her! Jane was a complete stranger to him, she didn't know how to get him to love her.

El forced her eyes shut, wanting to drown out all the screams in her mind. This was a world without El, how could she know Mike didn't even have a different girlfriend or something? What if he didn't like her at all.

Right now she wasn't El, she was Jane. And she didn't know how to get Mike to love this new person. Mike loved her, and this wasn't her.

So, with her whole head still on fire, she asked the only thing she could think.

“Uh, Lucy?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you know a place called Hawkins? It's just a few towns over. I- I was going to go visit today, do you want to come with me?”

4. Chapter 4

“Can you explain to me why we’re going all the way to Hawkins just to go to an arcade?”

El was sitting in the passenger seat of Lucy’s Buick, staring straight forward at the road ahead, barely comprehending what she said.

She just mumbled, “Turn right up here,” and gave out a sigh. El had spent the past 20 minutes instructing Lucy on how to get to the small town, of course she’d want to know why they were coming here.

El didn’t know who this girl was really, but she was Jane’s friend and right now, she was Jane. She couldn’t lie to her. So instead she half-heartedly let out as much of the truth as she was willing to give.

“There are cute boys who come here.” She shrugged her shoulders.

Lucy looked over at her with eyebrows raised, “We had to drive all the way out here for you to pick up guys?” She let out a long chuckle, “So young Janey finally wants a boyfriend. You should have just told me, I could set you up with one of David’s friends. Besides, I’m pretty sure any guys at an arcade are going to be around 13 years old.”

El tried to laugh along with her, just grateful that Lucy wasn’t pressing for any more questions.

She silently prayed that her hunch was right and her friends would be there. She knew they had a tradition. Every year, the day after Christmas, they came to the arcade. Whether or not they still had that tradition was what worried El.

She tried to brush away any doubt. They had been doing this long before they met her, of course they were going to be there.

But with one worry out of the way, it only left room for a new one to pop up.

What was she doing? She had to no idea what to do there, whether the boys were there or not. She saw them yesterday and it didn't do anything. Seeing them today wouldn't change the fact that she was a complete stranger.

So now she knew she had to get Mike to fall in love with her, what difference did that make? El didn't know how to do that. Her mind was drowning in fantasies of the worst case scenario. She imagined Mike having another girlfriend. Or him just not being interested in Jane at all. Or after yesterday, he thought she was just a weirdo and a stalker.

“Is this the place?” She was jolted out of her thoughts by Lucy. She looked up at the big sign, with the flashing lights that read ‘Hawkins Arcade’.

“Yes,” She said, already halfway out of the car.

And so, only a half hour later, El found herself leaned up against a game of Skee-Ball staring at the doors of the arcade, just waiting for the people she wanted most to come in.

When she first arrived she'd sneakily looked around the whole building for the boys. Lucy made several jokes about how she was acting like some private investigator on a mission, but El just tuned her out.

“What did I say? There's not a single guy over 14 years old here,” Lucy scooted next to her by Skee-Ball, sipping a soda from the food court.

Right as she said that though, the doors swung open and four teenage boys walked into the arcade.

El nearly collapsed at the sight of her friends. She thought she could see them, but now that they were right before her she could barely move. Mike and Lucas looked like they were bickering over something, Dustin was rolling his eyes, while Will was jokingly pushing them apart. But they were laughing and carefree and El felt her heart beat twice as fast upon seeing them.

The four people she loved most, right before her eyes, and she didn't know what to do.

“Finally some guys around our age,” Lucy joked, snapping El out of her daze, “What do you think about that one with the curly hair? He seems pretty cute.”

El let out a loud snort at that. She couldn't contain her cackling at the thought of her and Dustin. Lucy even bringing it up was making El crack up in the middle of the arcade.

“So I guess that's a no?” Lucy was snickering as well, “Well what about the tall one? He looks nice.”

El smiled weakly, and Lucy understood that was a yes. The duo watched the four boys for a bit, not wanting to act weird and approach them so suddenly.

“When are you going to go talk to him?” Lucy pestered her, “You've been staring at him for like a half hour now.”

“I don't know what to say!” El whispered back.

Lucy opened her mouth the reply, but neither of them noticed Mike making his way over to them. He cut off Lucy before she could say anything.

“Hey, um, aren't you the girl from the car yesterday?”

Oh no, El thought. He recognized her. Now he was definitely going to think she was some kind of stalker.

“Oh, uh, yeah.” Her mind was desperate looking for an excuse, “I

thought that was an old friend's house, I think I had the wrong address."

Please believe me, please believe me, ple-

"Oh cool!"

A wave of relief swept through her. El didn't even notice the look Lucy was giving her, obviously questioning where she'd seen this boy before.

Then a familiar look came across Mike's face. A red eruption stretching all the way down his neck caught El's eyes. He was staring at her, getting that beautiful blush she loved so much.

She felt her cheeks heat up as well. Mike had told her billions of times how pretty she was, but she never thought, or had a reason to even consider really, that he would still find her so beautiful if she was just a stranger.

"I'm Mike, by the way. Are you new to Hawkins?"

"Yes," She let out before she could stop herself. Why did she say that? El immediately started to beat herself up, that lie was going to fall right through. She didn't want the first thing she said to Mike to be a lie.

"I'm E- Jane!" She smiled, ignoring the turmoil her mind had fallen to.

She then noticed the sniggering a few feet behind them. Dustin, Lucas, and Will weren't having the easiest time keeping their humor to themselves watching Mike try to talk to a girl. That was definitely not a sight they saw often.

Mike turned around and glared at them before looking back at El, "Would

you, uh, ever maybe need someone to show you around town?"

"Sure!" El's smile took up her entire face.

She looked over to Lucy, "I'll, uh, see you later," She said hesitantly. Lucy didn't seem to care that El was leaving, instead she was shocked.

She watch as El followed Mike over to the group of other boys.

Lucy was staring at the unusual sight in complete confusion. How was it that Jane, who'd never even tried flirting before, just got the attention of the boy she just met?

How special was this boy?

5. Chapter 5

El piled into Lucas's Jeep alongside the four boys. She'd spent so much time in that car, always off on her latest adventure with her friends. Being in there felt like home almost, as close to home as she could feel right now.

"Let me introduce you," Mike spoke up, "This is Lucas, and that's Dustin, and that's Will. Guys this is Jane."

She waved and they all gave a chorus of "Hello"s.

Squashed in the middle seat between Will and Mike, El heard, "So where are we going?"

"I told Jane we'd show her around town. How about Benny's?"

Her heart stopped. One second it was beating, but then Mike mentioned *him* and it was over.

Benny.

Was Benny still alive? Then El got struck with the terrible realization that he never would have been killed without her.

All she wanted was to hear the boys talk, to feel like things were

normal for just a few minutes, but things were not normal and nothing was okay. All El could think about was Benny, his face plastered into her mind, a memory that after so many years still burned in her head.

His face wasn't the only memory echoing inside her, though. The sound of a gunshot came through, the feeling of terror, running out the door back into the Hawkins woods. It was a memory that no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't escape it. El could outrun the bad men, but she couldn't outrun the pain of the memories they gave her.

The Jeep pulled into the parking lot, a place she hadn't been to in years. She stepped out cautiously. The way the boys looked at El let her determine they knew something was wrong. They must have figured she seemed so on-edge because this was a brand new place, but little did they know that the reason was because this wasn't a new place at all.

The five teens sat down at a table and the boys started talking loud. El felt disgusted at how completely familiar this felt, because they'd never done this before, they never had the chance.

“So Mike, are you gonna tell us what tomorrow's campaign is about yet?” Dustin rolled his eyes.

Mike gave him a glare and pointed towards El with his head, trying to somehow communicate to Dustin telepathically, ‘Dude! Don't talk about D&D, there's a girl here!’

El saw her opportunity, “Are you talking about Dungeons and Dragons? I love that game!”

The four boys turned to her with mouths gaping open. A girl who played D&D? It seemed like a completely alien concept to them, they always believed girls would just think of them as giant nerds for playing.

“Y-you play that?” Lucas stammered.

Mike practically yelled out, “Do you wanna play with us?”

She grinned and nodded her head, “Great! We're playing at my place at noon tomorrow. My house is the big white one on Maple, do you know where that is?”

Of course I do, El thought, but just told him, “Yeah.”

Mike was blushing, and the other boys were snickering at this exchange. For a moment El felt good. She felt like things were as they should be again.

But then it was all ruined.

She saw Benny. He was just standing by the counter, laughing with a man El recognized as Earl, one of his old friends. Just watching Benny chuckling, smiling, breathing, she felt like her throat was

closing up.

Her face was a ghostly white, “E- Excuse me.” She bolted from the table towards the bathroom.

She slammed the stall door shut, and for the first time in so long, she felt trapped. The walls of the small stall were closing in on her, and she couldn't escape.

Her breath was speeding up, she felt like her lungs were attempting to push their way out of her mouth.

He's here.

He's really here.

It's my fault he died.

El felt the wetness on her cheeks and couldn't bother to wipe it away. Here he was, the first person who ever showed her kindness, who died because of her. Now he's back, but it's only because now she had never gotten involved in his life.

The thought made her want to throw up.

She started yelling at herself to ignore him. She had to do something, she was here for Mike. She was here to get back to her life, she couldn't get distracted. El had to do this.

But did she really? Would everyone be better off if she never entered their lives? Benny would be alive, Terry wouldn't have gotten sick, and all the boys were happy without her.

Did it really matter if she fixed things or not?

Wiping away the tears spilling down her face, El walked out of the bathroom and went over to a waitress, "Do you have a phone I could use?"

"What's going on?" Mike had come up behind her.

"I, uh, I need to call my friend to pick me up."

"You're leaving?" His eyes were wide open staring at her.

"Well, uh, I- I," El tried to stutter out a response, but staring at those big brown eyes she couldn't think of a thing to say. She could spend days just drowning in his beautiful eyes.

She thought back to the summer of 1985. It was her first summer back from the Upside Down. Dustin invited her and the boys to his house the day he opened his pool. She'd never learned to swim

before, at first she hated the thought of it. The pool reminded her too much of the bath in the lab. But she watched as the boys splashed around, laughing as always. Lucas tried to convince her it was fun, then Mike said he would stay in the shallow end with her if she wanted.

She smiled at the memory. They ended up spending most of that day teaching her how to swim. That also meant they taught her about the dangers of drowning.

Drowning was supposed to be pain, to be scary. Right now she felt her lungs losing air, her heart speeding up. She was drowning. But it wasn't painful or scary, instead it felt beautiful. Getting lost in Mike's eyes was a type of drowning she would welcome any day.

As El watched Mike, milliseconds turned to centuries and her mind raced with thoughts. There was one thing that she became sure of though. She couldn't imagine leaving. She couldn't imagine going back to Terry and never seeing Mike again. She couldn't live without him, leaving right now wasn't something El could ever do.

A part of her screamed she was being selfish. Everyone was better off without her. Mike was better off without her. But then she thought about going back to Terry and Lucy and all the other people in Jane's life and continuing to live a lie. Nothing would ever compare to the life she had in Hawkins.

"N- no," She broke the silence, "I just need to ask her if she would be able to pick me up later."

Mike smiled, those eyes El loved gleamed, “Good. I don’t want you to leave already.”

He walked back to the table, and when El returned a few minutes later the boys were back to talking about the campaign.

“Mike, come on!”

“Just give us a hint what it's about!”

“I'm telling you, it's about that prince from the last campaign! Mike didn't leave his story unfinished for no reason!”

Mike just ignored their badgering, keeping his head down.

“Does your character have a name?” He asked suddenly.

“What?”

“Your character. I need to add them to the game tomorrow, do they have a name?”

El looked down, anxious to tell him the name he had given to her so many years before, “El the Enchantress.” Her tone was barely a whisper.

“El? What's that from.”

She gulped, “It's a, uh, an old nickname.”

He smiled towards her, then finally joined in on the bickering between the other boys. They all were giving their theories for tomorrow and Mike tried to shush them. They ended up in an intense conversation about D&D, all in all the five teens sat at that old burger restaurant for several hours, laughing like the carefree kids most of them were.

El giggled watching them. She loved how her friends could always do this. The boys could take any topic and talk about it for days. They could talk forever if nothing stopped them even.

Sitting back watching the boys bickering and making jokes made El feel like everything was normal. But the empty spaces between her fingers where Mike normally held her hand reminded her that absolutely nothing was normal.

By the time the boys left it was already dark outside. Lucas offered to drive her home, but she told him her friend was coming to pick her up. Dustin and Will were already piled into the Jeep and Lucas went to join them, leaving her and Mike practically alone.

He rubbed the back of his neck, asking if she wanted company while she waited for Lucy. El wanted to say yes, but she looked at the time and knew Mike would get in trouble if he got home late. She wasn't

going to make him go through that.

“It's fine, but, uh, I'll see you tomorrow?” She phrased it like a question, like she wanted reassurance it was really happening, she was really going to see him again.

“Of course!” He smiled at her, but then jumped at the sound of Lucas hitting the horn outside, waiting for him to hurry up.

“Well, uh, I should go. Goodnight Jane.”

El looked at him, a rush of nostalgia pumping through her veins.

“Night Mike.”

6. Chapter 6

“So explain to me how you, without ever even attempting to talk to a guy before, got asked out in seconds by the guy you had just met?”

El felt a blush rolling over her cheeks. She was sitting in the passenger seat of Lucy’s car once again, after getting picked up from Benny’s.

“It wasn’t a date.” Was all she had to say.

“I’m sure,” Lucy smirked, but then dropped the topic, “So did you get his number?”

El shook her head, to which Lucy let out a sigh, “But I am meeting him again tomorrow.”

“What!”

El laughed at the shocked expression Lucy wore, “I’m playing Dungeons and Dragons with him and his friends.”

“How do you even know how to play that?”

She looked down, “An old friend taught me,” El refused to make eye contact.

Lucy didn't push her, for which El was beyond grateful. She launched into some story about what she did after El left, which she just listened to absentmindedly.

The next day El was happy to make her way over to the Wheeler house. She stood outside the place, somewhere she really considered to be her home, and felt her heart start to speed up. She had to stop herself from entering through the basement door as she usually did. Yelling at herself that she couldn't do that now, El made her way towards the front door.

The door swung upon after only two knocks. A smiling woman with perfect curls framing her face looked at El.

"Hello," Karen's mouth broke into a smile, "Who are you?"

"I'm, uh, Jane. I'm a friend of Mike's. He invited me over."

Karen's eyebrows furrowed, like the idea of Mike inviting anyone other than his small group of 3 friends was a completely new concept. It was definitely out of the ordinary, and not at all something she expected today.

She gave a skeptical look, but then attempted to cover it up, "Well, uh, come in! Mike's in the basement now, down the hallway on the right."

El was silently grateful she didn't question her about anything. Instead she just made the familiar path over to the basement door when she heard laughing from inside.

"I still can't believe Mike invited a girl over!" Dustin's voice echoed all the way up the stairs and through the door.

"Oh shut up!"

Lucas was cackling along, "He's not even going to be playing the game, just staring at her the entire time!"

"I will not!" El's heart warmed. After years of being together the boys had gotten so used to her and Mike, but that didn't mean they stopped their endless teasing. El could picture in her mind the blush that was probably creeping up his neck right now.

"I'm surprised he's not hung up over that girl from his dream last night honestly."

A girl?

Mike groaned, "It was just a weird dream, don't try and make it weirder."

"Wait what happened?" Will spoke for the first time since El got there.

“Will didn't hear, it was on the way to his place on Christmas!”

“Mike had some dream about this girl, Dustin and I were betting he'd end up getting obsessed with her, imaginary or not.”

“Shut up!” His voice was hard to understand, like he was covering his mouth with his hands as he talked, “The dream wasn't even about the girl really. Well it kinda was, it's weird. We were like 11 or 12 or whatever, and the Demogorgon was real. Then it tried to kill Will or something, I can't remember well, and we found this girl in the woods who ended up saving him.”

He stopped, realizing he was babbling on about the dream. The boys were looking at him like he was crazy, no one daring to speak after that.

After several seconds of quiet, something quite unusual for this group of boys, Dustin broke the silence, “What Mike didn't mention was in this dream he was totally obsessed with the girl!”

Lucas and Will started laughing and Mike turned a deep scarlet.

Meanwhile one staircase away, El's heart was racing. Her eyes were wide open, too shocked to move. Mike remembered her, or at least he knew something. He dreamt of her, that had to mean something?

She started debating. Should she tell him the truth? Would he believe her now? If he learned she was El and knew he loved El then...

No. She shook the thought from her head. El wanted nothing more than to tell him everything, but she sounded insane. Who would believe that the girl they just met was the same one they had a dream about days ago. It sounded ridiculous.

It suddenly hit her how long she'd been standing there, listening to the boys. Taking a deep breath El opened the basement door and started climbing down the stairs. All the boys' heads snapped around at the noise and watched her make her descent into the basement.

"Hey," an awkward blush formed as they watched her.

"Hello."

"Hi!"

"What's up?"

The boys all greeted her, well except for one. Mike just looked up like a deer in headlights, and she could swear she heard him whisper, "She came."

Mike had pulled a new fold-up chair next to him for her. When she sat down the boys all launched back into conversation.

“Did you guys hear what happened to Troy?” Lucas was grinning, like he had the greatest news to share.

“No, what?”

“Chief Callahan busted his Christmas party for beers! He spent the holiday at the police station!”

The boys all lept into a chorus of laughter, but El couldn't move.

“Ch- Chief Callahan?”

“Yeah?” Lucas raised his eyebrows.

“What, uh, happened to Chief Hopper?”

Dustin gave her a skeptic expression, “How do you know who that is?”

“I had a, um, friend who used to live here. She told me about him.”

The boys all looked down, not making eye contact. Even Mike was silent, which was weird. The Mike she knew never avoided a

question.

“Uh, he died a couple years ago,” Dustin was looking at the ground.

“What?!”

Lucas cleared his throat, “My mom told me it was the anniversary of the day his daughter died or something. He got really drunk, passed out, and never woke up.”

El’s head was spinning. Hopper was dead. Her father was *gone*.

No he isn't, she reminded herself. This isn't real. He's alive and married to Joyce and he's still chief and he hasn't had a sip of alcohol since the day he adopted her.

He's not dead as long as I don't let him be.

Her mind was screaming, but she just pushed the voices to the back of her mind. She couldn't get caught up with this, that was a surefire way to make sure things didn't get better.

Mike tried to end the awkwardness in the room, “Uh Jane, where are you moving here from?”

“Indianapolis,” She blurted out the first place that came to mind.

“That's where my dad lives,” Will whispered, mostly to himself. El's heart sank, she knew Will hated any reminder of his father.

“Are all of you from here?”

“Mike and Will and I are,” Lucas started, “Dustin moved here in fourth grade, but it's like he's been here forever.”

“Are you going to miss your old school?” Mike asked her, and suddenly she felt the pounding of her brain scrambling for an answer.

“I guess, I mean, um, I won't really have any of my friends here.”

They seemed to believe that answer and she had to stop herself from giving out a sigh of relief. She hated lying to them. She felt messy and guilty and wanted to hide her face.

“You should join AV Club with us,” Mike practically yelled out. His attempt to cover his eagerness wasn't working.

“Yeah!” Dustin agreed, “It's mostly just us, and a few other people, but it's a lot of fun and it's a great way to meet people!”

“And don't worry about losing friends, you've got us here.” Will gave her a reassuring smile.

El felt her heart beat three times as fast. She really loved these boys, and right now they were proving why. How she ever got lucky enough to meet such amazing friends was beyond her knowledge.

She smiled brighter than she had in days, “I'd love to join.” All the boys then broke into grins as well.

“Okay we should start the game now,” Mike interrupted the moment, “It might take a long time.”

“I'm gonna go get snacks first,” Lucas jumped from his seat, followed by Dustin seconds after.

“I'm coming too, I gotta make sure you bring the right chips this time.”

Will was standing up soon as well, “I'm gonna go to the bathroom before we start, be right back.”

Within less than a minute, Mike and El were left alone. At first there was an awkward quiet, the kind of silence that comes when you want nothing more than to talk, but have no idea what to say.

“So, have you, uh, played D&D long?” Mike tried to start a

conversation.

“Yeah. A friend taught me when I was 13.”

And so the silence was back. Mike wanted to say anything, but something about this girl made him feel like everything he could say just wasn't right. His heart was speeding up, he couldn't think straight. He wasn't used to this feeling, but it was making things incredibly awkward when all he wanted to do was to talk to her, yet he was now doubting everything.

Then desperate to say something, Mike let possibly the worst thing slip out. His mind yelled at him to just shut up, but the words had already made themselves at home on his lips.

“Were you crying at Benny's yesterday?”

“W-What?” El's mouth was hanging open.

The shame started pouring in. Why did he have to say that? He just met her, why did he have to act so creepy. Mike was beating himself inside, “Um, it's stupid. Forget I said it. Your eyes just looked a little red and I was worried that... just, uh, it's nothing.”

Part of her was so embarrassed Mike had noticed, but the other part felt her heart beating out of her chest. Even with a stranger he was still so observant and caring, El loved this boy so much.

“I had a, uh, friend, I guess, a long time ago,” She started, hesitantly trying to figure out how to say it, “He died when I was little, and I was kinda reminded of him yesterday.”

Mike didn't know what to say to that, so he reached out for her hand and squeezed it, while blushing all the way down his neck. His reassuring hand squeezes were always a comfort for El, but right now it suddenly felt like she was elevated to Heaven.

Soon after the sound of the basement door opening came down the stairs. Mike pulled his hand away when the three other boys rushed down the stairs.

Soon after the campaign began. El watched the game go on, the boys all yelling and arguing over strategies. She always loved watching them play, but she loved Mike's storytelling most of all. She had trouble paying attention to the game, whenever she looked over to him she seemed to get lost staring at the faces he made and the dramatic performances he gave to actually pay attention to what he was saying. She tried her best to follow along, even if in the end she knew only just enough so that the other boys wouldn't realize her dilemma.

When the campaign ended after 10 hours, El didn't really know what she expected. Not that she was complaining, any day where she got to spend 10 hours with her friends was a dream.

She wished she could stay there forever, normally she would have not-so-subtly yawned until Mike asked her if she wanted to sleep here instead of go all the way back home. But today wasn't normal, and

looking at the time El realized she needed to get going.

She told the boys goodnight and was halfway out the front door before she felt a hand on her shoulder stop her.

Mike looked like he had just ran up the basement stairs to make sure she hadn't left, out of breath he gasped, "I had a really great time today. I hope we can see each other again."

He shoved a piece of crumpled paper into her hands, then bent his head forward in attempt to block the obvious blush from her sight.

El unfolded the paper and saw numbers scribbled over it. She smirked seeing he was giving her his phone number.

"I'll call you soon." She gave a flirty grin and was out the door, Mike couldn't help but stare at her as she went.

"Bye Jane!" He called out.

And there went her good mood.

Things were finally starting to feel normal. Even if El knew she was lying to herself, today felt so ordinary in the best way possible. She laughed with the boys, flirted with Mike, she really felt like she was El again. But there was the reminder, right now she was Jane, and she couldn't bear that.

She felt the anger pitting deep inside her as she drove away. This wasn't fair, she didn't ask for this! Well maybe she did, but she didn't ask to be ripped away from everyone she cared about! She didn't ask for her friends to forget her, for her family to not know who she was, for her own father to die!

El didn't know who was behind doing this to her. Whether it was God or some other omnipotent being or anyone else, but she knew she *hated* them.

The car speeded home, El couldn't even pay attention to driving. So what if she crashed? Maybe she would wake up in the hospital and everything would be normal. Or maybe she wouldn't wake up, but would that really be a bad thing?

The car didn't crash though. El slammed the door closed as she got out and walked into "her" house. Before she knew what she was doing she was running into the room she sadly called hers, El knocked over all the papers on the desk in the corner. She started pulling down all the pictures from the walls, they weren't real, she didn't want to be forced to stare at them.

She grabbed the pillow and started hitting it against the mattress, letting out all her anger on the poor thing. Then something with a glint caught her eye.

Her head snapped around and she couldn't stop herself from running towards the vanity. El didn't know what she was doing, she didn't think about it, but she had grabbed the razor and switched it on, taking it straight to her head.

She didn't understand what she was doing, but piece by piece she took the razor to every strand of hair she had. She let out a scream of frustration, tears were now pouring down her face.

El hated having short hair, it was her biggest insecurity all those years ago. All it did was constantly remind her of all her lost freedom, and the people staring at her on the street didn't help.

As much as she hated what she was doing, she couldn't stop herself. She needed to feel normal right now, she needed to feel like El.

When it was over she just stared at herself in the mirror, ignored tears streaming down her puffy cheeks. She started growing out her hair as soon as she escaped the lab, her hair hadn't been buzzed since she was 12.

When El looked at herself she felt like she was 12 years old again. She was in a new place, she didn't know anything, she wanted to run and hide herself away.

But she was going to fix this.

7. Chapter 7

El was up for hours staring at herself in the mirror. Her cheeks were red and puffy, her eyes long cried out.

Why did she do that? She yelled at herself all night. In an emotion-fueled decision she had just brought back her biggest insecurity.

Strands of hair lied all around her on the floor, practically mocking El, who couldn't stop looking at her buzzed head.

Once again she felt trapped. She knew the feeling all too well, and right now all she wanted to do was pound on the walls and scream until she was let out, until she got back to her life.

After some time, Terry knocked on her door. El couldn't bring herself to say anything and waited for the sound of the doorknob turning. When Terry walked in, she saw the mess that El had made, the hair on the floor, the interesting new hair cut and gasped.

“Honey, what happened?!”

El could only respond by bursting into all the tears she had left in her. Terry pulled her into a hug while El sobbed into her sweater.

She pulled away, exhausted with her head pounding, “I- I’m gonna go to s-sleep.”

“Jane what's going on?”

“I'm tired, I w-want to lie d-d-down.”

El started stuttering through the sobs, a habit she could never really brush away when she was upset.

When she woke in the morning, she hit the sudden realization of what had happened the previous night. Leaning up, El realized she wasn't alone in the room.

Terry was sitting at the foot of her bed waiting for her to wake up, her head turned around when she realized El was awake.

El went to say something, to ask what was happening, but Terry cut her off, “Jane I don't know what's going on, but you're shaving your head and Lucy is telling me you've been spending the last few days in Hawkins, I'm worried about you.”

El didn't know what to say, silently praying that this would just be a lecture and then everything would move on. The last thing she needed was for Terry to forbid her from going to Hawkins or something.

“I don't think it's safe there,” Terry let out a deep sigh, “When I was pregnant with you, some workers from Hawkins National Lab

approached me about being a part of some drug testing. I turned them down, it was just a sketchy, hippie experiment, but I really think that town is bad news.”

El just stared at her with wide eyes. She turned them down? So that's what how she got out of the lab in this world.

“I don't know why you're going,” Terry continued, “But I encourage you to stop.”

The woman stood up and walked out of the room, content with her scolding, and El bolted up, breathing heavily.

She got dressed and attempted to leave without Terry noticing, and started to drive herself to the one place that she could think of to go.

The Hawkins Library was a fairly big building. El spent a lot of time in it when she was younger. When the boys were in school and Joyce and Hopper were at work, she was left home alone. The boredom became excruciating, so she resorted to spending time in the library. She started taking out children's books and a dictionary, then would sit down for hours reading and looking up any words she didn't know.

Her daily library visits helped her a lot with reading and learning, when she was older Miss Marissa even offered her a part time job reading to children on Saturday mornings, which she gladly accepted.

Everyone loved her at the library, but right now it was as if she'd never set foot in there before.

Out of all the time she'd spent in there, there was one section she didn't know where to go for, she'd never needed to know.

Walking up to the front desk, she squeaked out a question, "Do you keep obituaries?"

The librarian instructed her where to go, and she started digging through the piles, desperate to find one name.

Then he was there. Jim Hopper's face was staring right up at her from the picture in her hands.

The date said July 6th, 1985. El read through the passage for her father.

"Former police chief Jim Hopper was hospitalized last night with alcohol poisoning. The date, being the anniversary of the death of daughter Sarah, who passed away 5 years ago, is believed to be—"

El pushed the paper down, she couldn't read it. She came thinking that the paper would help her understand, would ease the anxiety inside her, but she wanted to vomit reading about her father like he was dead. He wasn't dead, she tried to reassure herself, she saw him only a few nights ago, and she'll see him again once she ends this.

She looked back at the picture of him. It must have been from a long time ago. He looked younger, wrinkles hadn't yet found their way across his forehead, he had no facial hair, and he was smiling brighter than El had ever seen him.

It must have been from when Sarah was alive.

She didn't know what she expected, but she felt like she couldn't breath. Chills were making their way down her back.

El pushed the paper down, refusing to look anymore. She tried to focus on anything else, when she heard the library doors swing open and familiar voices echo down the shelves.

“I promise, I'll only be a minute. I told Holly I'd pick up some book for her.”

El's neck snapped towards the library entrance upon hearing Mike. Her sharp movement obviously caught his eye.

Lucas, who was standing next to Mike, started to elbow him, “Dude, is that..?”

“Jane.”

They walked over to her, El tried to pretend she wasn't watching as they did.

“Hey Jane, I almost didn't recognize you!” Mike gave her a nervous smile.

Lucas spit out the first thing that came to mind, “What's with your hair?”

Now was Mike's turn to elbow him.

“Sorry, I mean I'm just wondering why did you shave it?”

El felt the insecurity bloom in her cheeks, she had already noticed the man sitting a few feet away staring.

“I, uh, used to have it like this, a long time ago. Feeling a little nostalgic over then I guess,” Her mouth struggled with the word ‘nostalgic’ but the boys didn't notice.

That was the closest thing to the truth she could say. Was she nostalgic? She definitely wasn't nostalgic over the lab, over living in fear and insecurity. But, God, was she nostalgic over having the boys with her through that.

Maybe she was starting to learn all those things were the same.

Lucas cleared his throat, "Well, uh, that's really cool."

"You look pretty!" Mike slipped out, then broke into a deep red.

El gave a shy smile up to him.

"So what are you doing here?" Mike asked, then glanced down at the paper she was holding and immediately regretted asking, "Oh, uh, did you know him?"

"He was an old family friend, I hadn't seen him in a really long time and had no idea this happened," El made up on the spot, desperate to change the topic, "So what are you doing here?"

"I'm picking up a book for my sister. Have you ever heard of something called Fantastical Fairies? It's some kids series Holly loves, apparently there's a new book I promised I'd get her."

"That's really sweet." El looked up at him, he really was an amazing big brother.

Mike was looking back at her, Lucas coughed to snap them out of it, "We're about to meet Dustin and Will at the movies. They're doing a Star Wars marathon, all three movies in one sitting."

“Do you wanna come?” The words were out of Mike's mouth before even thinking, “If you like Star Wars, that is.”

El was 13 the first time the boys had shown her the movies. They were all curled up in the Wheeler basement. Dustin and Lucas were bickering over snacks, as always, when the movie started. Mike read out the words streaming across the screen for El, knowing she couldn't yet read that fast. If she was being honest, cuddled up next to Mike, with her head leaning on the crook of his neck, she was having trouble paying attention to the movie. Mike would never admit it, but so was he. It was fine though, Mike had seen the movies enough times already, and Dustin was explaining everything to El anyway.

El smiled at the memory. She'd seen the movies a billion times since then, and she'd loved them every time.

“Sure!” She smiled bright, “I'd love to come!”

Mike quickly checked out the book for Holly and they piled into Lucas's car. When it parked outside the movie theater, Dustin and Will were waiting outside, obviously impatient over the other two boys.

However when they saw the third figure who stepped out of the Jeep, all their impatience washed away, instead they started snickering at Mike.

When El went to greet them, she was happily surprised they didn't comment anything about her hair. The group made it inside and took

their seats just in time as the first movie was starting.

The Millennium Falcon had just reached the Death Star when Mike made a daring move, one that El would have laughed at his cheesiness if she was herself. Instead she blushed feeling Mike yawn and put his arm around her.

Mike may have been exempt from her laughter, but he still had to endure the sniggers from the other boys.

El started to lean into him, by the end of the movie she was practically lying on his comforting arms.

She closed her eyes, for a second everything felt right. Snuggled next to Mike was the closest to home she'd felt in days.

Then the lights came on. A worker announced that there would be a ten minute break before the next movie began. Reluctantly, El pushed off Mike as all the boys stood up stretching. Will announced he was getting a popcorn refill, while the others said they were going on a bathroom break.

El sat there alone, smiling to herself in the almost-empty theater. All of this felt so natural, being with the boys and watching Star Wars with them.

This was still scary and frustrating, but watching Mike fawn over her like they were 13 again made it better.

It felt like falling in love all over again.

8. Chapter 8

“Did you go back to Hawkins?”

El bolted up upon hearing Terry’s voice. She stood in the doorway, caught.

“Honey what’s going on? You’ve been acting so different lately, and what’s with the sudden obsession of that town?”

It was then that El realized Terry wasn’t angry or upset, she was genuinely worried about her.

“I’m calling Dr. Briber, do you remember him from when Dad died?”

Now she was calling a shrink, El wanted to sink down. She really wasn’t doing a good job hiding everything, Terry even thought she was crazy.

She didn’t have anything to say, or anything she wanted to say. El simply looked down and as watched past Terry, who let out a sigh, on her way to the bedroom, hoping for nothing more than to fall asleep and let some good dream steal her away.

Dr. Briber came to the house the next day. Apparently he knew Jane well enough to make her special for a house call.

“So Jane,” He started, folding his hands and making eye contact so intense it made El uncomfortable, “How are you feeling today?”

“Fine,” she responded plainly.

“Your mother tells me you’ve been acting different lately. Is there anything going on?”

What was she supposed to say? This isn’t real and she’s trying to get back to her life? They already thought she was out of her mind.

“What prompted you to do that to your hair? Many people take to external appearance when they feel the need to change, did anything specific lead you to that?”

El already determined she didn't like this guy. He asked too many questions, maybe that was what he was supposed to do, but the last thing she wanted was to answer a billion questions on how she was doing, she knew perfectly well how she was doing and she didn't need to talk about it with someone else.

What had he mentioned, the need to change? More like the need to escape change, she thought glumly.

El went silent, making the decision that she was refusing to talk to him. He may not even exist, she thought, who knows what things were like in the real world? Then her colorful imagination started spinning. What if back in her life this man was Terry's therapist?

"Something's obviously bothering you. I haven't seen you so closed off since your father died."

That was enough to make El jump out of her thoughts. Right now, more than anything, she was reminded of her younger self. She felt out of place, silent, scared. But Dr. Briber was reminded of Jane when she lost her dad.

Did Jane once feel like this? All the trapped fear El knew too well, did Jane know those feelings as well?

She tried to brush off these thoughts. Jane didn't exist. El was Jane, and this whole thing wasn't even real, none of these things even happened.

Yet her mind still scrambled.

Jane is who El would have become if it wasn't for the lab. All the pain the lab brought her, was it possible El would have still gone through that pain, even for a completely different reason?

"Jane are you okay?" Dr. Briber snapped her out of her thoughts, "You seem to be tun-"

"I- I'm fine. I've been going to Hawkins because I met some friends who live there. I didn't tell my mom because she would have gotten protective," El started beating herself up for lying once again, but right then there wasn't anything to do but lie.

Dr. Briber wasn't her friend, he wasn't even real. Or maybe he was, but he wasn't real to El.

The doctor gave her a cautious look, like he knew it wasn't true. Well it was true, partially at least.

He asked her a few more questions then left, off to tell Terry what he thought was going on.

El looked over at the clock. It was only 3o'clock, but she was already exhausted with the day.

Part of her wanted to call Mike, but decided to give him some space. El may be used to spending every day with the boys, but she didn't want to scare them off as Jane. She was too emotionally drained to socialize anyway.

El looked around the room. Dr. Briber's words has suddenly invoked a curiosity inside her. This was her without the biggest event of her life.

Who was she?

Her eyes were pulled over to the pictures. Terry had hung them back onto the wall after her breakdown the previous night. El had looked at them briefly before, but now she really wanted to see.

Most the pictures were of her when she was younger. There was one of her and a girl with brunette hair and glasses standing by a pool, El guessed they were around ten years old. Another picture showed her surrounded by several other girls while she blew out candles on the cake reading 'Happy 8th Birthday Jane!'

There were also several pictures of Terry and Becky. El was in some of them, others looked like they were even before her time. El smiled looking at them, some of those were real. There were times when the real Terry Ives was happy.

Before she had El.

There were also many pictures of a man. He was tall with slight facial hair and a bright smile. El thought this must be her father.

No one told her who were father was. They all knew about Terry, but Terry never bothered to tell anyone what had happened to the man she was with. El had never felt curious about him, just as she'd never felt curious about Terry. These people were never actually her parents.

But she knew who Terry was, at least. She never even had a clue who were biological father was.

She stared at the pictures. So many of them showed Jane and this man, they must have been close. With arms around each other and making silly faces, El realized how much of a happier childhood Jane had.

Turning around to the bedside table, El noticed the sole thing there. A small bouquet of daisies was in a little red vase. Even in a completely different life, she still loved flowers, El smirked.

She moved on to the closet, delicately turning the knob. It's was filled with all different kinds of clothes- dresses, sweaters, skirts, all not too different from El's own style. There was one thing on the top shelf that caught her eye though.

A white wooden box rested on the very top of the closet. El stoop on her toes in attempt to reach it and pull it down. She grabbed it and collapsed with it onto the bed.

The box was filled with different things. There were mixtapes, a pair of ballet slippers, notebooks, etc. But there was one loose piece of paper that caught her eye.

She unfolded the paper to reveal a letter. The writing was messy and scribbled. El held her breath as she read.

Dear Janey,

I'm not sure what Mom has told you, but you know I always want to be honest with you. No one is quite sure what to do anymore. I wish I could explain it to you, you're a smart girl, but instead I want you to use your smarts for something else. What's making me sick doesn't matter anymore. I want you to always know how much I love you, sweetie. You brighten up

my days every second.

Do you remember your first ballet recital? You were only five so I'm not sure if you would remember. Right before it started you ran up to me, terrified you wouldn't do well. Mom was just trying to fix your tutu, but I told you, "You're going to do great. It's okay for you to be scared, but that doesn't change how hard you worked for this. It may be scary now, but don't let that stop you from doing amazing on stage."

You did do amazing on stage. When you ran to find us afterwards you didn't even remember your breakdown. You were too happy to remember it.

I want you to always remember what I told you then, especially right now. Things are scary, I know I'm terrified, but you are a strong and smart girl and I don't want you to ever let fear get to you. Even if all your worst fears come true, I want you to always hear me telling you not to give up because of them. Even if I have to tell you that from far away.

I don't know what's going to happen, but I know it's going to be scary. No matter what just remember I love you, and so does Mom. We love you so much, sweetie.

*Forever and ever,
Dad*

El threw the letter down. The date at the top said November 6, 1983. She picked up a diary from the box and started flipping through pages in attempt to find the entry from the day that meant so much to her, both as El and as Jane.

There wasn't an entry for November 6th, but there was one for the day after. The last time she wrote in there, despite so many blank pages following it. It only had two words, simply reading "He's gone."

El sat back, trying to imagine how Jane felt. She was obviously close to her father. El imagined sitting by a hospital bed, her father handing her the letter. She imagined tears falling around her while she read it on her bed. She imagined re-reading the letter hundreds of times, the last words her dad ever said to her. She imagined keeping

a diary for so long, but once Dad died, what was the point?

That November in 1983 wasn't easy for El, but now she was realizing it wouldn't have been easy for her as Jane either.

El knew she wanted to be back to her own life, but she never really questioned why whoever put her here was making her sit through this.

Eleven went through a trauma most people couldn't even dream of. It destroyed her life for 12 years and still hurt her to this day. But if that hadn't happened, she still wouldn't have had an easy life. There were still so many ways the world would have filled her with pain and scars.

Maybe she should stop wishing the lab never took her. Without it she still would have had an extremely painful life, just a different life. And without the lab she never would have met all the people she loved or had any of the parts of her life that she couldn't live without.

Maybe for once she should stop trying to hide away what happened.

9. Chapter 9

El woke up the next morning with a much softer determination. This was no longer a fight for her life back, there was something she had to go through before getting it back. This was a wave she had to let pass, a lesson she has to learn.

Even with the gentleness of her determination, she was ready.

Rolling out of bed, El picked up the phone beside her. She still had the paper Mike had scribbled his number onto, but she didn't need it, she'd called him enough times to have it memorized.

One ring, two rings, Mike didn't answer the call until the third ring, at that point El was holding her breath.

"Hello?"

She grinned when he finally answered, "Hi Mike! This is Jane, from the other day. I was wondering if you wanted to do something with me today?"

She heard a sigh on the other end and suddenly her smile fell away.

"I wish I could, but-" There it was, 'but'- the last word she wanted to hear, "Break ends on Monday, my mom is forcing me to do homework now."

"Oh," she didn't even bother coming up with a real response.

"Do you, uh, maybe want to bring over any work you have and study with me? I mean, I'm sure my mom would be fine with that." His flirtatious voice was back and El could practically hear his smirk as she started to gain one too.

"Sure! I'll see you in a bit!"

She hung up the phone, beaming at it for a few minutes before getting up.

Terry had left a note saying she was grocery shopping, so El was able

to leave the house without anyone stopping her.

When she arrived at the Wheeler house, El knocked only once before the door swung open. She giggled to herself, realizing Mike must have been waiting by the door for her.

“Hey!”

“Hi!” They both blushed for a second, before Mike figured out what to say.

“Uhh, come in! It must be super cold outside!”

She took off her coat in the doorway, while Mike led her down to the basement.

“So I have this giant chem test the day I get back, so my mom is forcing me to study. She even brought out my older sister, Nancy’s old flash cards and stuff. What about you?”

El then realized that she completely forgot to bring any work, so much for her reason to be there, “I don’t have any homework, I figured I’d just help you study.”

Mike breathed out, “Wow you’re lucky. I’m pretty sure the last time I didn’t have homework over break was in seventh grade. My science teacher, Mr. Clarke, convinced all the other teachers not to load us with work on holidays.”

“He sounds super fun.” El knew of Mike’s endless adoration of Mr. Clarke.

He handed her his notes and she started quizzing him. She started asking about how much salt is in the human body or what the modern name of stibnite is, pretending she even knew what she was talking about.

El loved studying with Mike. He would get so deep into thought, especially with science, and she just found it adorable. She loved the way he would look over to his right when he got deep in thought, or how his nose scrunched up when he tried to remember. Then there was also the way his eyes would suddenly light up when he

remembered an answer.

There was something different about it today though. Mike was barely getting half the answers correct, and even when he did he didn't seem to understand what she was saying at all.

Mike looked on in confusion. Her Mike was never like this. How come all of a sudden he couldn't remember even the most basic sci-

That's when El realized. It wasn't all of a sudden, it was her. Nancy used to always help Mike study, then when she went off to college El took her place. For every big test they sat together, going over notes and questions, and Mike would always do well on the exams. Was there any chance he did well because of those study sessions with her? Would he have ended up losing his drive for school if it wasn't for her?

Mike started to get frustrated, and El felt terrible. She knew the discouragement of not knowing things, of feeling so behind.

"Hey, don't get upset," She tried to comfort him, "You'll get it eventually. You're obviously really smart, maybe you just haven't found the right way to study yet."

He smiled up at her, so thankful for this girl he barely knew, "I like studying with you."

For a second she felt bashful, but then she realized how close his face was to her.

This is my chance.

She started to lean in, she could finally kiss him and end all this. But right as her lips were about to hit his face, a door slammed upstairs, signaling Karen had arrived home. Mike pulled away, embarrassed and blushing down his neck. El groaned internally.

"So, uh, are you starting school in Hawkins after break ends?"

El didn't know what to say, she hoped this Hell would be over by the time break was over, so on a limb she nodded her head.

“Great! Well, uh, since you might want to meet some people, my family is throwing a New Year’s Eve party tomorrow night. It’s not that many people, really just me and the guys and our families, but it’s fun,” Mike got quiet, then practically raced his words, “Do you want to come?”

El brightened thinking of the Wheelers’ annual New Year’s party. She would play games with the boys and Karen would fill them up with all her leftover Christmas cookies and at the end of the night they had a big countdown to midnight. Those parties were some of her favorite traditions for the holidays.

“I’d love to come!”

“Great!” Mike was turning red, “Well, uh, we should get back to studying I guess.”

El looked down at the notes in front of her, not even noticing Mike staring at her while she did.

Notes for the Chapter:

I was honestly getting serious writers block while I wrote this chapter, and I needed to fill up a chapter for the timeline, so have some random fluff. Only one chapter left after this! :)

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

Quick shout out to everyone who supported me while writing this fic, thanks for everything! <3

Fireworks were going off as El made her way up the Wheelers' front yard. The night of the Wheelers' party had arrived, and she has no idea what to expect.

The booms coming from the sky were calming, they felt in tune with the pounding in her chest.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

The occasional crackle even seemed to mimic how her heart felt shaken. It was as if the fireworks above her were being set off deep in her chest, that's how it felt for her at least.

She tried to figure out what was making her so scared. It wasn't like this was different from any other day in the past week.

El knew that wasn't true though. It was December 31st, the last day of the year. In just a few short hours it would be a completely different year, El wondered if things didn't go back to normal before then, if they would be stuck forever.

Her theory didn't have much foundation, but that didn't do much to ease the aching in her heart that was screaming this was her last chance.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

El took a deep breath, pushing her anxiety to the bottom of her chest as she knocked on the door.

The door swung open and Holly stood there, with a cookie shoved into her mouth.

"Who are you?" She asked through the cookie.

"I'm Jane, I'm a friend of Mike's."

Holly took the cookie out of her mouth, "Mike!" She screamed behind her.

"What?!" He yelled back, stepping up the basement stairs. He stopped short when he saw her.

"Hey," he rubbed his neck, where a blush had already made its way, "Um, come in!"

"That was my baby sister, Holly," He whispered to her, grabbing her hand and pulling her towards the basement.

"She seems sweet."

El meant it sincerely, but it caused Mike to let out a chuckle.

"So the guys and I tend to just hang out down here. My mom is probably going to force-feed us hundreds of cookies, so be prepared. She always makes too many for Christmas then uses today as a chance to get rid of them."

El's mouth watered at the memory of Karen's Christmas cookies.

"Lucas's parents are here too, along with Will's mom and brother. Dustin's parents are visiting his older brother at his college for the night. Nancy's boyfriend is here too, and so is her best friend, but they don't get along well so things have been pretty tense tonight," Mike eyebrows were raised when he told her the last part.

El just nodded along, trying to get a sense of who was here and who wasn't, and how things were different from normal.

"We're probably in the clear from adults tonight. They're all hounding Nancy with questions about med school, so they'll just ignore us." El didn't think Mike realized how reassuring that was. No adults also

meant no lying, no questions, and no improvisation.

El had to suppress her laugh upon hearing about med school, though. Nancy was still aiming high, apparently some things never change.

Mike kept going, probably not realizing he was rambling at this point, "The guys are setting up a Monopoly game down stairs, if you wanna play."

El just giggled at the thought. The boys playing Monopoly was a hilarious sight. She came down the steps to see the boys in their usual seats, all too wrapped up in bickering to even notice her presence.

"Okay so before we start, I think there's an agreement we all have to make." All the boys turned to look at Dustin, "While there will be no friends while this game is going on, we all remain friends when it's over."

Mike rolled his eyes, "We'll see Dustin."

El laughed to herself, she knew soon enough there would be enough yelling for them to forget any pre-game agreements.

"Yeah," Lucas added, "It depends if you cheat again!"

"I did not cheat!"

"Sure, and the fact that you were the banker and you won has nothing to do with it!"

Dustin let out a groan, "So do you want to do it then?!"

"It's too much work! It's just a distraction from the game!" Lucas was yelling out.

"Then stop complaining when I'm distracted and still win!"

At that El couldn't contain her amusement anymore, laughing out loud and finally alerting the boys she was there.

"Hey Jane! When did you get here?" Will asked her.

“Right now,” Mike rolled his eyes, “She came down with me, but you guys were too wrapped up in Dustin's cheating to notice.”

“I do not cheat!”

They all rolled their eyes at Dustin's exasperated expression, and the game began.

The game did entail a lot of fighting. Dustin was in the lead, with Lucas not far behind him, when Karen called for them to come upstairs.

“Stop whining about my banking already,” the topic hadn't let up since the game started, “Do you really think I'd cheat? It's my fiduciary duty as banker to be honest with everyone!”

Mike let out an irritated groan, “Fiduciary duty? Stop acting like you know anything about finance!”

“Fiduciary? More like fi-douche-iary.”

They all cackled at Lucas's pun. El laughed right along, for the first time that week she really felt happy. Not despite everything happening, she was genuinely happy with how things were right then.

“Boys! And uh, Jane! Can you please come upstairs, it's almost midnight!” Karen was calling for them once again.

The boys all rushed to the top of the stairs, but El felt a hand grab hers and hold her back. She turned to give Mike a questioning look, but he just blushed, “Hold on for a second.”

When all the boys were up the stairs as the basement was dead silent, El decided to push him on why he wanted to be alone with her right then.

“Mike...”

“I didn't want to ask you in front of the guys, but, uh, I was wondering. My school has this thing called the Snow Ball. The middle school had theirs last week, and the high school one is on Friday. It's

really just our stupid winter formal and I was wondering,” He took a deep breath, “Would you want to go with me?”

El’s heart clenched. Of course he was asking her to the Snow Ball, it was the most Mike move out there. He did it when they were 12 and after all these years it was still how he chose to ask a girl out.

“I would love to go with you,” She was smiling bright.

Mike rubbed his neck, “Yay,” He uttered shyly.

Suddenly the door swung open and Will was at the top, “You guys hurry up! The countdown is starting!”

They raced up the stairs to join everyone else in the circle in the living room, counting down around the TV set.

20, 19, 18

The excitement bled around the room. For a second, El completely forgot all that was going on. She always loved the rush and the activity of New Year’s.

12, 11, 10

Holly was blowing into her horn like midnight had already come. Steve had his arm around Nancy, and even Jonathan was laughing brightly.

6, 5, 4

El wanted to scream out, the anticipation could be heard all around the room. In those few seconds nothing else mattered. She forgot all about the fears she had earlier, nothing that had happened that week was even registering. All that mattered was in a few seconds in would be a whole new year, a whole new beginning.

3, 2, 1

Happy New Year!

Cheers rang out. Holly was honking her horn more excitedly now.

Everyone was laughing and yelling, but could you blame them? It was a fresh start to a new year, a whole new year where nothing bad had happened yet, the year was nothing but opportunity.

El was so ecstatic she was almost surprised when she felt a gentle grab to her cheeks and Mike leaned down to to give her a shy kiss.

When their lips touched, El wasn't sure if the fireworks she heard were outside or just in her head.

Boom, boom, boom.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and shoved her fingers through his long hair, and that's when it hit her. Mike had kissed her. Was this nightmare now over?

"Mike?" She pulled away, tears of joy forming in her eyes.

He gave her that smile she loved, a mix of excitement and innocence.

"Jane?"

Her smile crumbled.

"I- I have to go."

She was running out of the room. It didn't work. What was she supposed to do now? Was she confined to live this life? Was this her punishment for nothing appreciating what she had before?

Tears were rushing down her cheeks as she ran out of the house.

"Jane stop!"

She spun around. Her plan hadn't worked, she was stuck here. What else did she have to lose?

"My name is not Jane! It's El!" She turned around and snapped, "And we didn't meet a few days ago, we met when we were 12! I was from Hawkins Lab and when I got out you took me in! We saved Will when the Demogorgon was after him," She was screaming through the tears now, she was already stuck in this Hell, why not tell him

everything? “And you fell in love with me! But then I wake up last week and it's like none of that ever happened! It's like we're strangers!”

“What are you talking about?!” He spat back at her.

“You asked me to the Snow Ball? We already went! We were 13 and Jonathan took pictures of us and the boys teased you for a week for asking me! You spilled punch all over your suit and you taught me how to dance!” She was breathing heavily, no longer caring how insane she sounded, “That's not the only thing I know either! I know you push yourself in school because your family all compares you to Nancy! I know Mr. Clarke inspires you to be a science teacher, but D&D campaigns make you want to be a fantasy author! I know you're insecure of your freckles, but I think they're the most gorgeous things on the planet!”

She turned back around and started to storm away, Mike couldn't keep from staring after her as she went, “Jane- El! Wait! How do you know all that?”

El turned to face him once more, this time she couldn't yell, she just looked sad, “I know because I love you and you love me. I know because I can remember you, but you can't do the same for me and it's killing me watching you.”

Mike was confused, searching her face to try and recognize her, “How could-”

“How could I know all those things if I wasn't telling the truth?! I don't know what happened, but I woke up on Christmas and the entire world had changed!”

“That doesn't make sense,” Mike was staring at the ground.

El walked up to him, they were only a few feet apart, “It doesn't, but if you believe me, even in the smallest bit, please have some faith in me. I miss my life. I miss you.”

She stormed away back to her car. Mike wanted to call after her, but he was too confused to think of anything to say.

Mike laid in bed that night, his mind was racing deep into thought. None of this made any sense.

Mike believed in science. Science didn't exactly justify people waking up one morning in a different life. Besides, this was his life. He could remember everything about it, it wasn't some made up fantasy-- he had lived it. Yet he was still conflicted. While he believed in science, he also believed it wasn't as rigid as people thought. There could be scientific explanations to everything, even things that most people considered impossible. Could any of what she had said been true?

He yelled at himself to shut up. He was taking the word of some girl he didn't know over his own memories.

Yet still, Mike felt a drawing towards that girl. Jane, El, whatever her name was, he couldn't help but feel like she should be important to him.

She asked for him to have some faith in her. Did he dare to put that kind of blind trust in a stranger? Mike wasn't sure why, but he felt he should.

When El got home she ran up to her bedroom in tears. What was she supposed to do now? Everything was ruined, of course Lucy's story had nothing to do with real life. How foolish could she be? Did she really think that with a true love's kiss all her problems would be solved? This wasn't some fantasy story. There weren't any princesses who needed rescuing or knights in shining armor or dragons to slay. There was just one confused girl who wanted nothing more than to go home.

Was there anything left for her to do?

Both Mike and El stayed up late that night, different questions bouncing on their minds. Mike had a battle waging on inside him. He was struggling to choose between everything he knew and everything he felt he should know. El had come to a decision. She was trapped here and it was about time she accepted it.

She had ruined things with Mike, even as Jane she wouldn't be able to fix that. Now all there was left to do was to become Jane, it was a

wish come true after all.

Sleep felt unnatural to both of them that night. There were too many reasons to stay awake, and even more questions keeping them up. But even still, sleep's claws were able to pull Mike and El into the deep.

El woke up the next morning with her head pushed way into her pillow. Her head was pounding and she could still feel the soreness of her eyes from crying. She felt a strand of hair stuck in her mouth, and groaned as she pushed it away.

Then suddenly her mind was jolted awake. A strand of hair? Not daring to look around and see anything, El pushed her hands to her head. Her hair was long again.

She bolted out of her spot. This was her room. El's room, not Jane's. This was her bed and her walls and her pictures lining the walls.

She tried to tell herself this had to be a dream, she didn't dare believe what she was seeing in case it wasn't true.

El heard a knock and watched the door swing open. She couldn't believe her eyes when Hopper walked in. She jumped off her bed and immediately pulled him into a hug.

"You're okay," She said, to him but also to herself.

"Merry Christmas to you too, kiddo," He responded with a grizzly laugh.

"Christmas?"

"Yeah, did you forget it was today?" It was Christmas, it was as if everything from the last week hadn't happened, "Your mom wants to get breakfast started, but before we eat I think there's something you should see outside."

El was still cautious as she followed Hopper out of her room. What was outside? Was something going to come out and take her away again, or would she wake up and be back in Jane's room?

He gestured to the front door and she slowly turned the knob, curious as to what was on the other side, but still dreading to find out.

She didn't see anything so she took a few steps out onto the porch and shut the door.

El jumped when she turned to see Mike sitting down on her left. When he saw her he immediately bolted up to face her.

El could feel her heart speeding up when she saw him. He was there, he was really there. She looked at Mike and saw the exhaustion on his face. He had dark circles bulging out under his eyes, El figured he must have had a rough night.

That was when she remembered the fight they had. The fight that launched her into her apocalyptic week.

"El, before you say anything I'm so sor-"

Before she knew what she was doing she was jumping onto him, wrapping herself into a suffocating hug.

"I don't care what happened last night. I love you so much," she murmured into his chest.

"I love you too." He kissed the top of her head. That was when he noticed the few tears that started making their way down her cheeks, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah just, uh, I had a bad dream last night," El didn't dare to tell him what had actually happened to her, "It made me realize how lucky I am to have you."

"Not as lucky as I am to have you."

He pulled her back into the hug, and resting in Mike's arms, El finally realized she was home.